

A wife inherited practically nothing from her husband. If she had been faithful to him and had been of a good disposition, her parents-in-law might give her a certain number of horses or other property. The tent was considered the woman's possession while she lived with her husband; but on his death, even this was no longer her property. If the tent was worth keeping at all, it generally went to the dead man's sister, if she was newly married. A man, on the contrary, inherited his wife's property, though he generally gave back part of it to her relatives. 428
562
[422]

A woman, on her husband's death, went back to live with her parents, or, if these were dead, with her brother, uncle, or other relative. An old woman, on the death of her husband, generally went to live with her children, most frequently with a daughter. 768

On the death of a brother, especially a beloved one, or of his father or his son, a man cut his hair and went out naked (with only a buffalo robe) on the prairie to cry from morning until late at night. Women, besides cutting their hair, and cutting themselves (especially on the leg) until they bled, would also go out to cry, naked from the waist up. A sister cut herself for a brother, but a mother mourning for a child underwent the most pain. Of course the mourning was greatest for an only child. In such a case, parents might give away everything in their tent and nearly all their horses, stripping themselves of property so thoroughly as almost to go naked. Some mourners fasted for a number of days. If, while a person was crying on the prairie, one should in joke attempt to scare him, he might kill the disturber. Mourners were the bravest people in war, caring about no danger whatever. 765
[304]

Burial was in trees, on high rocks, or in caves inaccessible to wolves and coyotes. The corpse was wrapped in a burial robe. 764

A menstruating woman was called *niniitixtj*. It is said that she did not retire to a separate lodge, or eat separately from her family; but she did not approach a sick patient, because of the evil effect she would have on his condition by her presence. Some women were said to wear a breech-cloth during their menstruation. 841
[291]

In childbirth, women either lay or knelt. They grasped a stick supported in a horizontal position by two upright forked sticks set in the ground. After the umbilical cord had been severed, the end was left on the child. It was thought to fall off on the fourth day. The woman who had cut the umbilical cord received as a gift the knife she had used. A woman who washed a new-born child was given the vessel in which it was washed. The afterbirth was hung in a tree. If it were left lying to be handled, the child would be afflicted with sores. For three or four days after birth, the child was given suck by other women than its mother. This statement apparently refers chiefly to a woman's first child. 844
[846]

CHAPTER VII

BIRTH AND INFANCY

CONCEPTION AND CONTRACEPTION

It was a common belief among the Gros Ventres that for conception to occur, sex relations must continue over a period of time, conception could not occur as the result of one copulation. The fact that a girl would be given in marriage before she reached physiological maturity tended to confirm this belief, which is also linked with another one, namely, that a girl would not menstruate unless and until she had experienced sex relations. This latter belief is reflected in comments made by old women concerning the young unmarried girls of the present day. Coming Daylight and Singer remarked on several occasions: "Nowadays girls are 'terrible.' They menstruate and have well-developed figures before they are married." These signs of physical maturity the old women take as absolute evidence of loose conduct on the part of the girl, regardless of what the facts in the individual case may be. 842

The Gros Ventres apparently recognized some relationship between conception and lactation. Coming Daylight, for instance, said: "The Indian women claim that they didn't become pregnant so soon if they nursed their babies. They always used to carry their infants about with them because, if they went far away and left them, their milk might spoil. The old-timers used to say that if a woman took good care of her children and kept them close to her, her family would not increase so rapidly. It is the young ones nowadays who have the bottle-fed babies!" 842

There were certain precautions, too, that a woman should take to keep her offspring properly spaced. "If you sit in the place from which a pregnant woman has just risen, you will conceive immediately. Dispose of the afterbirth quickly. Destroy all clothing worn during pregnancy, even moccasins, or give them to some woman past child-bearing age. If a woman put these clothes on again she would soon become pregnant. Nowadays though mo-

Birth and Infancy

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stance, it was the dark of the moon when a woman ceased menstruation, she kept track of the months by marking with charcoal on a piece of wood, or by notching a stick, each successive time the moon was in that phase and "she would usually estimate it right."

Childbirth usually took place right in the woman's own lodge. Should someone there be sick, he would be moved to another lodge if possible, for while it was considered bad for the sick person to be in the same lodge with a woman in her menses, it was much worse were the woman in labor, for the odor of the blood at delivery would affect the sick person adversely. In fact, a person who had only been near the place where a woman was being delivered was not allowed to come near a person who was ill. If the patient could not be moved, the woman in labor would go to another lodge, preferably to that of her grandmother or of her widowed aunt. She would avoid her own mother's lodge as her father or brothers might be around and she would be "ashamed" to go where they might be.

Although the attitude has somewhat changed now, in former times, according to Coming Daylight and Singer, a pregnant woman was supposed to be reticent regarding her condition right up to the last moment. She might suffer intensely, but "you would never know there was a thing wrong with her." Only when she seemed to be very close to term did they send for a midwife and for some old man or woman who would give her medicine. A male doctor did not touch a woman in labor, but would give her medicine to alleviate the pains. Mary told of her own experience. "There was a well-known doctor of this kind who died about ten years ago. He was blind and, when called on a case, would sit with a pot of medicine beside him. He attended me and when he heard me say I was in pain he would just touch me with the end of the stick and the cramps would go away. Finally I complained that I was tired. The midwife said that it would soon be over, but the old doctor told them: 'No. It hasn't turned yet.' I thought this was strange that he should know this as not only was he blind but he had not touched me. Later on he said: 'It will be about a half hour more.' And he was right."

Different practitioners have different methods. Singer witnessed the following case. "A man had received power from

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CHAPTER IX

MARRIAGE

POLYGYNY AND THE CHILD-BRIDE

The institution of the child-bride, combined with polygyny, was characteristic of Gros Ventre marriage up to about 1880. How far back it was practiced is difficult to say. Our informants who themselves were married off as children of ten or eleven to their first husbands about the year 1865, took the custom for granted and so far as they knew "it had always been that way."¹ 545 582

All girls were given in marriage before puberty, and usually as wives to older men with independent households. Because of the disparity in age between husband and child-bride, many of these girls were widowed early and remarriage was quickly arranged for them, even if the widow were not claimed by her husband's brother. Moreover, divorce or separation initiated by the husband was relatively easy and frequent. Consequently the majority of Gros Ventre women knew at least three or four different husbands, and often in fairly rapid succession. Upon successive remarriages the wife's age came to approximate more closely that of her husband. 586 587 582

Young men were not eligible for marriage until about twenty. By that time a young man would have attained proficiency in hunting and have taken the first steps in ceremonial life, being a member of one or other of the two adult men's societies, either the Wolf-men or the Stars. In addition he should have war-deeds to his credit and some property of his own, especially horses stolen from the enemy, in order to qualify as husband. In view of the fact, however, that very young girls were given more often to older already-married men, most young men marrying for the first time had as wife "an older experienced woman." Actually 582 587

¹ It was believed that a girl could not menstruate until after she had experienced sexual intercourse. If, therefore, a girl had her first menses before she had been given in marriage, her family would be disgraced. 584

793 co-keepers with her, but they or one of them would substitute for her in such minor duties as taking the Pipe out of the lodge in the morning and bringing it back in the evening when she was sick abed, or busy, or during her menses. During menses the co-keeper was not allowed to handle the Pipe. After Crow Bull, during his keepership, gave away his head wife and co-keeper, Digger, to Small White Cow in a drunken spree and Digger went away as wife to Small White Cow, Crow Bull's second oldest wife, Coming Day became co-keeper in Digger's place. If a man at the time of becoming keeper had a young wife with an infant, she and the infant were sent away to another lodge as infant-crying was not allowed in the keeper's lodge where the Pipe was.

The Flat Pipe keeper, if he had two or more children, chose one and one only of his children, more commonly a boy, to be Pipe Child. It was a strict rule that he could keep only one of his children with him; all his other children had to live elsewhere than in their father's lodge, because, for one important reason, the Pipe was jealous. Some keepers were such rigorists in the matter that they practically forgot all their other children.

793 The children that were put out of their father's lodge naturally found this hard and rebelled, but they were trained to take it as a matter of course. A special interest was taken by others in such children as they were felt to be unfortunate in being deprived of the care and affection of their own parents. These children were permitted to visit their father and mother but they were under restrictions when they did so. Their grandmothers or foster parents would instruct them how to behave on such visits. They could not stay long, much less sleep there. They had to sit quiet in a special place in their parents' lodge and not roam around in it freely. They had to stay mostly near the door and not go near where the Pipe was. They were strictly forbidden to play in their father's lodge when visiting there. If their mother gave them something to eat they could eat it. They could sit on her lap. But they could not talk loud or shout. When so visiting they were not at ease and felt sort of foreign and awestricken. The Boy 793 thought that these children may have been jealous of their sibling, 593 the Pipe Child, but in such case they would have had to keep

The Feathered Pipe and Other Pipes

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and as long as you live see that they do not sell it or part with it." 793
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So at Curly Head's death the Pipe fell to Iron Man II (Tall Jack), a relative of Curly Head, who since 1937 (1938) has looked after it. In 1948 it was still being kept in Curly Head's house.*

The normal term of keepership of the Feathered Pipe was four years. The very first keeper held the office 80 years, according to the origin story given by Garter Snake, and some later ones, according to tradition, up to 20 years, but the usual limit was supposed to be at most two or three terms, that is eight or twelve years. 793

There was always a Pipe woman or co-keeper, wife of the keeper. She handled the Pipe bundle and in general had about the same ritual and other duties toward it as had the co-keeper of the Flat Pipe toward the Flat Pipe bundle. The Feathered Pipe keeper had to have at least two wives, for during her menses the co-keeper could not handle the bundle and had to sleep and live outside the keeper's lodge and another wife of the keeper had to substitute for her in the handling and care of the bundle. [841 •
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There was always, too, a Pipe child,—a girl, unless the keeper had no daughters, in which case a son could be selected by him as Pipe child. Thus the oldest son of Sitting High, who had no daughters, became Pipe child. The Pipe child was not necessarily appointed at once by the keeper on assuming the keepership. Garter Snake was not made Pipe child until she was about six years old. Iron Necklace who had been Feathered Pipe keeper some

* In the summer of 1951, Iron Man, assisted by The Boy, had a ceremonial opening of the Feathered Pipe bundle. Dr. Louis B. Hagener, Professor of Biology of Northern Montana College, accompanied by his wife, and Dr. Otto Nitz, Professor of Chemistry, now at Stout Institute of Technology, Menominee, Wisconsin, were among the spectators. The pictures in Plates 2 B-C, 3 A-D, were taken by Dr. Nitz at that time. Dr. Hagener has kindly supplied information regarding the 1951 ceremonial. He writes under date of Aug. 8, 1954, as to final disposal of the Feathered Pipe bundle: "Since the young people were so apathetic over the bundle, its significance, and the ceremony, Iron Man and his wife had resolved not to open it again. They were debating as to whether it should be given to a museum or whether the tribe would outfit Iron Man and his wife for a journey and permit them to dispose of it somewhere in the mountains." [R.F.] [114
796
186]

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757 it drops off. It is powdered before use. Mary Ereaux' mother used
278 it, on a warm rag, for chickenpox. It was first gotten by a man who saw it in a dream and it said to him: "I am good for everything, to drink and to use externally too." It was this man who spread the knowledge of this medicine.¹

For diarrhea a tea was made from the boiled roots of rose bush or cherry bush and drunk. For asthma and hay fever the vapor from juniper berries put in a pot of boiling water was considered helpful. Sage, in the very early days gathered and used only by sacred Pipe keepers, was later used by everybody: being rubbed and smelled for headache; the leaves especially the top ones, boiled and drunk for colds, coughs and tuberculosis.

The little daughter of Singer's husband, Iron Bucket, was "poisoned" [bewitched] on one occasion, when Singer was present, from some meat broth she had taken. After taking some of the broth, the little girl remarked "M-m-m this tastes funny." While Iron Bucket was telling stories, the little girl would interject from time to time the single word "moose." Finally she had a fit. They then gave her a lot of warm water as an emetic, and after she had vomited several times she recovered.

Raw liver and blood from a freshly butchered buffalo were considered as a cure for tuberculosis. Mary Ereaux' grandmother had told her that people would go after a man who had just butchered a buffalo to have him dip bits of the manifold in the warm blood and to have the children eat it as a delicacy.

Beaver oil from the oil sacs was used as medicine but we obtained no details.

[841] When a woman in her menses, or one who had been with a man the night before, entered the lodge of a sick person, the latter grew weaker. To protect the sick person fumigation was resorted to. Powdered beaver castor (always kept on hand if available, for this purpose) was put on live coals in a pan, and the patient without any clothing on, huddled beneath a blanket over the smoke so that it went all over the sick person's body.

757 Blood-letting was a common procedure, purely "rational" with no magic-religious element at all in it and calling for no "power"

¹Cf. Kroeber, 1908, 226.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

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of the society. The officers were free to transfer their ceremonial equipment to other members whom they would select. Following the typical Gros Ventre pattern of transfer of ownership, the recipient would present as lavish gifts as he could afford to the donor while the relatives of the recipient showed their appreciation of the favor to their kinsman by giving away expensive gifts in his honor. All of this took place publicly at the dance. [531]

Particular dances and songs were attached to each office and the owners of the ceremonial drumsticks were required to know in correct order all the numerous songs and to provide the musical accompaniment for the whole ceremony. These four drumstick owners were joined in certain of the songs by four women singers selected from among the wives of the Wolf-men. The owners of the various objects were responsible for the proper care thereof, the crow-belts and the drum receiving most respect. When not in use, the crow-belts were kept wrapped in special bundles in the lodges of their respective owners, but were hung outside when the owner's wife was in her menstrual period. Moreover, those who danced wearing the crow-belts were obliged to refrain from sexual relations for two or three days previous to the dancing and, before donning the belts, to make a smudge of sweet-grass to incense themselves and the crow-belts. The drum, too, received special attention. One informant speaks of it as having been "nicely decorated," and we know from Kroeber's description⁹ that the trimming was very similar to that of the Assiniboine Grass dance drum.¹⁰ [533] [841] [784] [833] [782] [534]

Procedure. The actual dancing took place in a special circular dancing-place in the center of the camp circle. This "corral," as it was sometimes referred to, was constructed from several lodge covers, but was open at the top and the entrance thereto was at the east. The tipi of the drum-keeper was put up nearby. Opposite the opening of the "corral" was the place of honor where sat the officials,—with the exception of the sword owners, who with their assistants were at either side of the entrance. The

⁹ Kroeber, loc. cit., p. 238.

¹⁰ Lowie, R. H., *The Assiniboine*, AMNH-AP 4, pt. 1, 1909, p. 67.